

Office of Special Counsel

§ 1820.6

(c) *Expedited processing.* (1) Requests and appeals will be taken out of order and given expedited treatment whenever OSC has established to its satisfaction that:

(i) Failure to obtain requested records on an expedited basis could reasonably be expected to pose an imminent threat to the life or physical safety of an individual;

(ii) With respect to a request made by a person primarily engaged in disseminating information, an urgency exists to inform the public about an actual or alleged federal government activity; or

(iii) Records requested relate to an appeal that is pending before, or that the requester faces an imminent deadline for filing with, the Merit Systems Protection Board or other administrative tribunal or a court of law, seeking personal relief pursuant to a complaint filed by the requester with OSC, or referred to OSC pursuant to title 38 of the U.S. Code.

(2) A request for expedited processing must be made in writing and sent to OSC's FOIA Officer. Such a request will not be considered to have been received until it reaches the FOIA Officer.

(3) A requester who seeks expedited processing must submit a statement, certified to be true and correct to the best of that person's knowledge and belief, explaining in detail the basis for requesting expedited processing. For example, a requester within the category described in paragraph (c)(1)(ii) of this section, if not a full-time member of the news media, must establish that he or she is a person whose main professional activity or occupation is information dissemination, though it need not be his or her sole occupation. The formality of certification may be waived as a matter of OSC's administrative discretion.

(4) OSC shall decide whether to grant a request for expedited processing and notify the requester of its decision within 10 calendar days of the FOIA Officer's receipt of the request. If the request for expedited processing is granted, the request for records shall be processed as soon as practicable. If a request for expedited processing is denied, any administrative appeal of that decision shall be acted on expeditiously.

(d) *Aggregated requests.* OSC may aggregate multiple requests by the same requester, or by a group of requesters acting in concert, if it reasonably believes that such requests actually constitute a single request involving unusual circumstances, as defined by the FOIA, supporting an extension of time to respond, and the requests involve clearly related matters.

§ 1820.5 Responses to requests.

(a) *General.* Ordinarily, OSC shall have 20 business days from when a request is received to determine whether to grant or deny the request. Once OSC makes a determination to grant a FOIA request for records, or makes an adverse determination denying a request in any respect, it will notify the requester in writing. Adverse determinations, or denials of requests, consist of: A determination to withhold any requested record in whole or in part; a determination that a requested record does not exist or cannot be located; a determination that a record is not readily reproducible in the form or format sought by the requester; a determination that what has been requested is not a record subject to the FOIA; a determination on any disputed fee matter, including a denial of a request for a fee waiver; and a denial of a request for expedited treatment.

(b) *Adverse determinations.* A notification to a requester of an adverse determination on a request shall include:

(1) A brief statement of the reason(s) for the denial of the request, including any FOIA exemption applied by OSC in denying the request; and

(2) A statement that the denial may be appealed under section 1820.6(a), with a description of the requirements of that subsection.

§ 1820.6 Appeals.

(a) *Appeals of adverse determinations.* A requester may appeal an adverse determination denying a FOIA request in any respect to the Legal Counsel and Policy Division, U.S. Office of Special Counsel, 1730 M Street, NW., (Suite 218), Washington, DC 20036-4505. The appeal must be in writing, and sent by regular mail or by fax. The appeal must be received by the Legal Counsel and Policy Division within 45 days of

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the date of the letter denying the request. For the quickest possible handling, the appeal letter and envelope or any fax cover sheet should be clearly marked “FOIA Appeal.” The appeal letter may include as much or as little related information as the requester wishes, as long as it clearly identifies the OSC determination (including the assigned FOIA request number, if known) being appealed. An appeal ordinarily will not be acted on if the request becomes a matter of FOIA litigation.

(b) *Responses to appeals.* The agency decision on an appeal will be made in writing. A decision affirming an adverse determination in whole or in part shall inform the requester of the provisions for judicial review of that decision. If the adverse determination is reversed or modified on appeal, in whole or in part, the requester will be notified in a written decision and the request will be reprocessed in accordance with that appeal decision.

§ 1820.7 Fees.

(a) *In general.* OSC shall charge for processing requests under the FOIA in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section, except where fees are limited under paragraph (d) of this section or where a waiver or reduction of fees is granted under paragraph (k) of this section. OSC may collect all applicable fees before sending copies of requested records to a requester. Requesters must pay fees by check or money order made payable to the Treasury of the United States.

(b) *Definitions.* For purposes of this section:

(1) “‘Commercial use’ request” means a request from or on behalf of a person who seeks information for a use or purpose that furthers his or her commercial, trade, or profit interests, which can include furthering those interests through litigation. OSC shall determine, whenever reasonably possible, the use to which a requester will put the requested records. When it appears that the requester will put the records to a commercial use, either because of the nature of the request itself or because OSC has reasonable cause to doubt a requester’s stated use, OSC shall provide the requester with a rea-

sonable opportunity to submit further clarification.

(2) “Direct costs” means those expenses that OSC incurs in searching for and duplicating (and, in the case of commercial use requests, reviewing) records to respond to a FOIA request. Direct costs include, for example, the salary of the employee performing the work (the basic rate of pay for the employee plus 16 percent of that rate to cover benefits) and the cost of operating duplicating equipment. Direct costs do not include overhead expenses such as the costs of space, and heating or lighting the facility in which the records are kept.

(3) “Duplication” means the process of making of a copy of a record, or of the information contained in it, necessary to respond to a FOIA request. Copies can take the form of paper, microform, audiovisual materials, or electronic records (for example, on digital data storage discs), among others.

(4) “Educational institution” means a preschool, a public or private elementary or secondary school, an institution of undergraduate higher education, an institution of graduate higher education, an institution of professional education, or an institution of vocational education, that operates a program of scholarly research. To be in this category, a requester must show that the request is authorized by and is made under the auspices of a qualifying institution and that the records are not sought for a commercial use but are sought to further scholarly research.

(5) “Non-commercial scientific institution” means an institution that is not operated on a “commercial” basis, as that term is referenced in paragraph (b)(1) of this section, and that is operated solely for the purpose of conducting scientific research the results of which are not intended to promote any particular product or industry. To be in this category, a requester must show that the request is authorized by and is made under the auspices of a qualifying institution and that the records are not sought for a commercial use but are sought to further scientific research.

(6) “Representative of the news media” or “news media requester” means any person actively gathering